I. Paris

The clear June sky was laced with a few threatening clouds. Montmartre Square, usually crowded and noisy, was almost empty in the early afternoon and looked like a painting of itself done in early morning, before the crowds arrived. The tourist crowd had left, and Parisians who had not yet fled the approaching German army had other concerns than climbing Montmartre for their after-lunch coffee.

The funicular from the boulevard to the Sacre Coeur was no longer operating. By the time Bruno and Brenda had climbed the steep stone stairs they had little breath for conversation. From the esplanade in front of the church they could see the almost deserted streets, occasionally crossed by a car loaded with household objects.

Once on the Square they sought a café with an outdoor terrace. The red painted tables and chairs and the yellow umbrellas, bright among the skinny old locust trees, contrasted with the grayish walls of the buildings dotted with dark green shutters. Bruno chose a table and tilted the umbrella toward the sun, saying "This should shelter us from either sun or rain."

"How shrewd of you," said Brenda, settling contentedly in her chair. Her accent, British public school but not affectedly so--she was the daughter of an Oxford linguist--contrasted with Bruno's, heavy with central European intonations. A suspicion of mockery in Brenda's remark made him belligerent.

"Weather strategy is of course easier than life strategy," he said curtly. Just above average height, with powerful shoulders and dark unruly hair, he looked more like a soccer player than a mathematician, which he was. Next to Brenda--tall, ash blonde, with thin pointed features--he might have been taken for a coach or a bodyguard. His dark suit, too heavy for the time of the year, contrasted with Brenda's casual summer dress.

They had met a few weeks earlier and had found it easy to be with each other. Brenda agreed to help him practice his English at meals and during their leisurely walks through Paris, in exchange for help in translating a few articles for her thesis. They liked each other, sparred verbally, and made love although they were not lovers. They both had other, older emotional ties to persons currently absent. Hers was an inmate of a French camp for Spanish loyalists. His lover, a fellow student from his university years, had been caught in the maelstrom of Eastern European politics and had been for years an inmate in various jails and concentration camps.

The conversation resumed after the beer they had ordered arrived. The subject, of course, was leaving: leaving Paris, that is, as hundreds of thousands were doing on that twelfth day of June 1940. Leaving or staying on. Brenda's mind was made up: she would stay.

"I may be able to help him, you know. And then, some of us ought to stay and write about it, later on. I keep a diary."

"That may hurt you if they found it."

"They? You think so? But I write down only facts, no names."

"Don't you think they could make you tell names?"

"Maybe. Will it actually come to that? Here? Has anyone ever tried to make you talk?"

"No, I never was tested that way. Anyhow, I never kept diaries, only mathematics notebooks. I mailed some off to Princeton last month, for safe-keeping."

"Yes. You wish to save algebra, I prefer to preserve events. Memories." Brenda made a long pause. Bruno was scribbling symbols on a paper placemat, then smearing them off with frost from his beer glass. His gestures betrayed

the conflict going on in his mind.

"What would I do if I went to America? Start a new diary?" Brenda went on. "Or to England, for that matter? Drive an ambulance and long for France? You should leave, though."

"I know. Princeton, Einstein, those are my realities. What keeps me here? Even her memory is fading, after all these years. And yet . . . "

"Yet?"

"Leaving is the reasonable thing, you see, yet staying seems the right thing to do. It's hard to explain why. I recall a story, a novel about Rome under Marcus Aurelius. A young patrician, at a time of persecution, starts going to underground Christian meetings just to flirt with a girl. But going to the meetings, even without being Christian, builds up in the young man an unsuspected bond to the group. So, when the ax falls and the group is arrested, he cannot bring himself to sacrifice on the pagan altar, and goes to his destruction. For nothing."

"For pride, maybe?"

"Rather for a subtle human commitment."

"What commitment would keep you here? Your woman? or I? We are neither of us part of your reality."

"It is hard to say. Maybe a commitment to Europe, old and threatened."

"Can you afford that luxury, just in order to test yourself?"

"The reasonable path is also a luxury if it will have to be paid in currency of guilt." Bruno paused and readjusted the umbrella before continuing. "And then there is something else. Fear. Fear of being afraid."

The afternoon had warmed up. Some tables had filled up, mostly with young people idle in the paralyzed city. A red-haired fellow, probably a high-school student, was listlessly playing on an accordian. Bruno ordered more beer. The

waiter mumbled something about thunder. Although the sky was now perfectly clear, a distant rumble could actually be heard. Brenda, who had driven an ambulance in Spain, was first to recognize it.

"Field artillery. They must be this side of Chantilly. Twenty or thirty kilometers away. Will this help?"

"Help?"

"Help you make up your mind."

Bruno had stood up, a bit jittery, and was searching the sky as if looking for storm clouds that could account for the rumble of thunder. Brenda laughed, teasingly but not unkindly.

"You see now why you cannot stay? To stay would mean being passive, waiting around, letting the storm drench you. The initiative--the opposition, as you chess players call it--would be theirs. You are not made for that. You jump up, you question the thunder. You need to act. But in a dream, in a nightmare one cannot always act. I am willing to wait. But I don't believe you can."

"Can one run away from fear and from one's roots and still keep one's self respect?"

Brenda's reply was spoken very deliberately. "Physical fear is the only respectable fear. It serves the preservation instinct. The other fear is only a concern for one's self image. A sentimental twist, not worth twopence in real life currency. Your currency of guilt is completely valueless."

"So, you think that what keeps me here is just an edge of my ego caught in a revolving door." He looked at Brenda whose hair was catching the warm reflection of the sun from a window frame. "If I loved you, would I stay?"

"If I loved you, I would go where you are going," Brenda replied.

"Am I going?"

"Of course you are. Never mind your unwillingness to admit it. Yours is a perfectly respectable little drama, a conflict between what you have been and

what you are becoming. The urge to become has already won."

They had left the café and were descending the Rue Lépic. On the cobblestones the sound of their steps merged with the distant sound of gunfire. In the early sunset the city was gray and gold. From the hilltop the windows reflected the sun rays onto the lead roofs farther down the slope.

As they approached the métro station Bruno stopped and watched Brenda walk the last few steps: how self-possessed she was, how different from himself, and yet how much a part of something he longed to be. He rejoined her and took her hand, which responded with a reassuring grip. In the station entrance Brenda said:

"You better hurry. I think I'll walk down toward the Opéra. Let's say goodbye here." Her kiss was sisterly but warm.

"We shall meet again, soon," Bruno said unconvincingly.

"Of course, you sentimental ass. Come to tea. After it's over."

II. Lisbon

After the dreary trip across Spain, when physical discomfort and political anger had made Bruno blind to the majestic, burned-out landscape, Lisbon was a refreshing oasis. In the cool dark streets of the old city the incense-breathing churches seemed to exorcise the pagan whiteness of the modern town. The influx of refugees from all over Europe added a note of sinfulness by exposing an amount of bare flesh never before seen in Portugal.

Bruno found Lisbon exciting. The absence of war--in central France his train had been strifed twice by German planes--and the presence of the busy port, with ships leaving for New York every few days--encouraged thoughts of a peaceful future. He had secured a passage on a good ship, with only a few weeks' wait. Now that the means were near, his eagerness to leave Europe increased. And yet the eagerness concealed an ambivalence, a troubled sense of guilt. In fleeing Europe, was he betraying something in himself? From time to time he heard rumors of British vessels gathering volunteers in northern ports of Portugal. He chose not to explore such rumors, but he slept badly and at night dreamt of Paris and of his home town. In his dreams, Brenda and his mother seemed to be asking him to come back.

One day in Lisbon's main square he ran into a Canadian scientist whose acquaintance he had made in Paris. When Bruno greeted him, the Canadian seemed taken aback; but after a brief exchange he relaxed and smiled. He had evidently decided that he could trust Bruno.

"Please, do not mention seeing me in Lisbon. Mine is a somewhat delicate mission."

"Don't tell me any more if you don't want to."

"No, you might as well know. In a sense you are part of it yourself."

"I? What do you mean?"

"I am trying to arrange for European scientists to escape from the Occupied countries."

"Escape? Where to?"

"To England, to Canada, to the United States. Wherever they can be useful. To us. And especially, where they cannot be used by them. Scientists, especially mathematicians like you have a very useful role to play in this war."

After a few more words the Canadian went away, leaving Bruno thoughtful and excited. The Canadian had spoken as if all was not lost, as if in fact the war were just beginning. The sense of hopeless defeat Bruno had felt was somewhat assuaged, and at the same time his voyage to America did not feel so much like an escape. A less selfish element had entered the picture.

* * *

Through a letter of introduction that someone had given him in Marseilles, Bruno had made contact with a Lisbon couple. They invited him to dinner for an evening of the last week before his departure.

When Bruno rang the bell of the apartment his host let him into a somewhat overelegant partlor. Simple modern furniture contrasted with a profusion of gorgeous oriental rugs spread on floors, on walls and couches. Sensing Bruno's surprise, the host smiled: "Rugs are my business. I sell them and I also love them." He was a tall lean middle-aged man, possibly Armenian, with a rather sad face. He had been a major rug dealer in Austria and had moved a fraction of his business to Lisbon. "Ultima thule. My wife does not like Lisbon but feels safe among beautiful rugs."

The word "safe" struck Bruno as odd. So did his hostess, who joined them a few minutes later. In her late thirties, tall, not beautiful but with striking copper-colored hair and a tragic profile that reminded Bruno of a Kollwitz print. Her speech had a soft, lingering Austrian accent that gave each sentence the sadness of a good-bye. Her name was Clara.

Both hosts took turns in serving dinner from a warming cart.

"We have adopted the American style," explained the host. "Clara prefers the privacy of souper-à-deux. Or à-trois, like tonight. Where you are going, house help is even more of a rarity than here, I understand."

Clara spoke little. More interested in Bruno's past than in his plans for the future, she asked about his family, his studies, his friends.

"I am a writer myself" she said, "a translator and reviewer of poetry. I need to know more about people like you, adventurers going the way of Columbus. Are you leaving Europe for good? Or will you come back some day?"

"I don't know," replied Bruno. "Who can tell what will happen to the world, and to each one of us, in the turmoil of this war? One must live from day to day--in fact, from continent to continent."

In her presence Bruno felt shy. The intensity with which she explored his feelings seemed a bit indecent. He preferred her husband's conversation, witty and concrete.

When dinner was over Clara wheeled the cart to the kitchen. Her husband was bringing out liqueurs and looking for some addresses and maps he had promised his guest.

Bruno went into the kitchen to help Clara. Together they unloaded the cart; then Bruno removed his coat, grabbed soap and dishrag, and went to work with the expertise gained in many Parisian kitchens. Clara stood by doing other chores.

Over the noise of running water Bruno heard a low moan. As he turned he found himself drawn, almost sucked into a long kiss, searching and yet desperately maternal. A moan of his own escaped him as the incongruous, preposterous kiss prolonged itself, without any embrace. His ludicrously wet hands still held the dishrag, hers a dishtowel almost like a shield. They soon recovered, both trembling. She said only: "Remember me." Then in silence they finished their

chores and return to the parlor.

The rest of the evening was surprisingly successful. Clara was silent at first, but later engaged Bruno in an argument on the role of poetry in history, a subject that brought out the passionate side of her intellect.

"Only poetry can provide the emotional continuity that Europe will need in order to recover its soul. We shall need another Goethe to make us feel human again."

The conversation continued, with a demanding tension, to which the earlier kitchen scene had made Bruno more sensitive. When he returned to his hotel Bruno was tense and exhausted.

His boat was leaving on Saturday. On Friday he found at breakfast a note: "It is a glorious day; don't waste it indoors. Go for a hike, then come to dinner to say good-bye. Bring me flowers. Clara."

As he rang the bell the flowers, a few yellow roses, felt uncomfortable--a prop in a romantic play. Clara and her husband were having cocktails. The conversation started almost where it had left off two days ago, dense and urgent. Dinner was more elaborate this time, deliciously French with a superb Austrian dessert and a sparkling white wine. Clara poured it herself, standing. She was dressed in a striking black and red gown. As she bent over Bruno, she kissed him on the mouth, softly and briefly. Then she straightened herself, laughing, gave her husband a quick kiss on the cheek, and went back to her place.

The evening went faster than the previous one. There was no dishwashing, nor was the parting theme stressed. Both husband and wife seemed determined to concentrate on togetherness rather than separation. When, quite late, Bruno rose to leave, his host offered to see him to his hotel. In the hall Clara held Bruno's face to hers, kissed his mouth, his eyes, his forehead, gently but with a desperate urgency. And she whispered: "Please, please, remember me, remember us. Remember Europe. Even if we have hurt you, don't reject us. Please."

And she put her arms around him like a mother taking leave of her son.

For a while the two men walked together in silence. At last the host began: "My friend, Clara is in exile. Her life is Europe, its past, its culture. She fears that Europe may become the land of the dead, a land from which the spirit has fled. She would like to salvage the links that keep that spirit alive. She would like to mark you--mark you with a commitment to the past, whatever freedom you may achieve." He paused to look at a dark church across the street, decorated by fantastic baroque turrets and convolutions of marble. Then he resumed: "Clara thinks of herself as a lighthouse on the last shore, beckoning to the departing."

"But why does she not leave?" Bruno asked. "Why don't you take her to America?"

The other shook his head. "Our roots are here. When you are older you will understand. Roots are something you don't inherit; you set them as you grow. We have become Europeans by freeing ourselves of local loyalties. Now our freedom chains us to this last fragment of Europe."

They took leave of each other in front of another church, also old but one that had obviously been redone in modern style: more pleasing to the eye than the other, older church but with less of the sense of mystery. Bruno, who had always considered loyalty to abstractions--religion, fatherland, nation--as nothing but prejudice, felt as if the seed of a new loyalty had now been planted in him. It was a bit frightening but somehow made him feel more grown-up.

Next day he embarked.

III. New York

On his fourth day in America, Bruno went to Columbia University to look up a mathematician, Professor Siegmullen. The experience of the past few days had been confusing; it had left him light-headed and emotionally divided. The glorious display of lights and skyscrapers and bridges, the contrast with the blacked-out, war-time Europe he had left behind, had made him feel excited yet diffident. At times he resented this attractive brave new world and feared being coopted by it. He felt guilty of his own incipient betrayal of Europe, as one feels guilty of leaving an old mistress. For the crowds he saw in the stores and streets the war was not a reality--and he longed both to forget that reality and to face it again. The conflict was unsettling. Stability would have to come from work.

The corridor at Columbia University was dark and forbidding. Bruno walked from door to door with trepidation. Finally, he found one of the glass-paneled doors slightly ajar. With relief, Bruno saw the name painted on the glass: H. Siegmullen, the famous mathematician he was hoping to see.

Uncertain whether to knock or enter, Bruno chose the least appropriate course: he called timidly through the open crack: "Professor Siegmullen?" A huge bulk of a man with a mass of graying red hair, his eyes bulging behind steel-framed lenses, his bulbous nose duplicated in a bulbous pipe, opened the door fully and bellowed, loud but not unkindly: "Wer are you? Come in. Close the door. I hate open doors."

"Forgive the intrusion," said Bruno, entering the room--completely lined with bookshelves holding manuscripts and books in remarkably good order--a typical mathematician's office. "My name is Bruno N. I was a student of Professor Katar. I arrived from France a few days ago. I was hoping you would have a few minutes to talk to me. Possibly help me obtain a library card."

Siegmullen, who had sat down at his desk, suddenly gave a gurgling, bellowing sound, which for some reason made Bruno think of an excited water buffalo. "Did you say Bruno N.? Are you the fellow with the schrechlich theorem? Two of my students--Dummkopfe!-- have been working for six months on that horror of yours. Made no progress at all. I've even been thinking of giving it a trial myself. I used to be a number theorist, like you, before I got into this applied nonsense."

Bruno was completely taken aback by Siegmullen's remarks. He had submitted the paper in question to a French journal almost a year ago without the benefit of comments from his teacher. He had not even known that his article had appeared. For a moment he wondered if this big fierce-looking fellow giving him such an unexpected reception, was mistaking him for someone else or, worse, was making fun of him. A thought, mean yet nourished by his past experiences, passed through his mind: "He is German and I am a Jew."

His host's next comment reassured him. "You have made a very important finding," said Siegmullen. "Let's go over it together." And he plunged into the subject of Bruno's article with mutterings of mathematical delight. The two of them were soon arguing, scribbling and throwing away one sheet of yellow paper after another. "You see, Herr Doktor?" Siegmullen kept repeating. "Gut, gut." Bruno realized with pleasure and surprise that this famous mathematician was treating him as an equal. The experience was new, alien to the hierarchical tradition of European universities.

Siegmullen was obviously out of that tradition. At one point, he remarked: "You have travelled a lot, haven't you? Before I came here in 1933 I had never even been in Italy or in England." Bruno could hardly suppress a smile at this naive remark. "After the fall of France there is hardly any place in

Europe for Jews, especially Eastern European ones. At any rate, I always expected to come here some day."

"At least you managed to get away. There is still a chance to work, here. And much less prejudice. But now to business. You must come to work with us and teach us the new highfaluting stuff in number theory. If you want they'll make you a research associate, whatever that means. But no money. You must get money yourself, foundation money or something. The university has nothing for pure mathematics. But I can help."

All of a sudden, he rose from his desk chair and went to a door that opened into the next office. "You must meet my research associate. Es ist very good. It has done all the best work from here. It speaks only German but can solve all sorts of problems." He knocked, and opening the door yelled at the top of his voice: "Miller, Miller, come here. We have a visitor, a famous man, a new member of the Department!"

While Bruno was wondering who this person referred to as "it" might be, a young woman came in, an attractive brunette with her hair tied in a solemnly flat bun on top of her head. "Good morning and welcome," she said cordially to Bruno after the introductions were made. Contrary to Siegmullen's statement, she spoke fluent English with a slight German accent. "We were talking about you a few days ago, reading your paper and wondering who and where you were. Glad you made it here."

There was some more technical talk. Then, when Bruno was preparing to take his leave, Miller asked, "Are you properly housed and where?" Bruno gave her the address of his cheap rooming house. For a moment he wondered what Miller's question meant. A date, maybe? On a day like this full of surprises anything might happen.

Early next morning Bruno was awakened by a knock on his door. The phone call--his first in America--was from a chemist, a friend of Miller's, offering

hospitality in his apartment. Bruno accepted gratefully, being eager to make new friends and to save his few remaining dollars. The chemist asked him to come over immediately before he left for work. In less than an hour Bruno was in his new home. And a real home it was--a comfortable, well furnished apartment lined with books. His host, a deep voiced, burly-looking fellow called Heinrich, was a refugee from Prague. While they breakfasted, Bruno told him of the whirlwind in which he seemed to be living since the day before--Siegmullen, the theorem, the unexpected chance to start work, Miller, and the sudden welcome in this home. "At the moment, I feel as if some benign spirit has taken hold of me. The coincidence of my meeting Dr. Miller, her knowing of your apartment, and thinking of it for me seems almost too unlikely to be natural."

Heinrich smiled. "Do you think you have reached the land of Cocagne, where all wishes come true? Just wait. You will get your share of trouble here, though perhaps not the same kind as on the other side. But now, before I go to work, let's see if there is anything else you need. Miller, whom incidentally I will soon marry, thinks you are quite capable of taking care of yourself. But as an old-time American--after almost two years here--I may be able to help. What are your plans?"

"Professor Siegmullen told me I should try to find foundation money if I want to work with him. At the moment I don't know how yet. I thought of asking my Princeton friend for advice: whom to contact, and maybe I'll also look for a part-time teaching job."

"OK. Help yourself to anything you want in the kitchen. If I come home late, I'll see you in the morning. Adieu."

The pace of events had made Bruno tired; he needed a few hours of rest. He picked up off the shelf a worn book that arose his curiosity because the spine was altogether missing. It was Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, in

German. A book on dreams fitted well the dream-like events of the last day. How should he interpret Siegmullen? or Miller? or Heinrich? Parental images? He was absent-mindedly leafing through the book when the phone rang. It was his host.

"Listen. I just talked to a colleague who knows a Foundation that helps university people from Europe. He has made an appointment for you with the president--eleven o'clock tomorrow. If you are interested keep that time free. I'll see you later. Goodbye. By the way, the name is Marner Foundation, 222 Park Avenue. Goodbye."

Bruno went back to Freud, this time reading more attentively. He was almost hoping to find some hidden meaning beneath the surface sequence of events--or rather, beneath the rush of kindness that seemed to be engulfing him.

That evening Heinrich did not appear, nor next morning. He left a note for Bruno, however, telling him that Friday, the next day, was housekeeper day. She would come in the morning and help Bruno if he needed anything. In fact she did come at eight--a middle-aged Jewish lady, comfortably stout, talkative in a precise German that had the didactic intonation of a school-teacher's speech. A teacher was what Frau Schein had been in Germany and what she hoped to be again after she learned enough English. Bruno listened to her life story while she fed him his first real breakfast in a long time.

"Let's take a look at you," Frau Schein decided after Bruno had finished his second helping of everything. "Do you think you can go look for a job in these trousers, wrinkled and full of spots?" They were Bruno's only pants. "Give them here. I'll take them to the corner store and they will have them clean in one hour. What about your raincoat? It's pouring outside."

"I haven't got one. I left Paris by bicycle and could take only a few

things with me." Bruno was faintly apologetic. Frau Schein gave him the reproachful look of a teacher reprimanding a first-grader who has come to school without his handkerchief. "Now give me those trousers and they'll clean them while I shop. You may sit in your underpants or go back to bed till I come back."

Before going, she made a few calls in German. The results, which started to materialize soon after her return, were remarkable. First came a little girl, about 10 years old, shyly carrying a raincoat, almost exactly the right size for Bruno, with a note, "Please return it when you wish. Good luck with your job." A few minutes later, an old man in a black coat and an embroidered yarmulke brought an envelope addressed to Bruno. It contained a coupon for fifty-percent discount on "Trousers and other Clothing Items."

Just as Bruno was preparing to leave a third visitor arrived, a short lady, obviously a friend of Frau Schein, who brought an umbrella--a retractable affair such as Bruno had never seen before. This was a loan just for the day. Frau Schein explained, "How could I be sure the raincoat would fit you?"

Bruno was laughing as he left the house. The rain had stopped, the sun was giving Manhattan a holiday sheen. Crossing Central Park, where some leaves were already red and gold, Bruno received the glory of the city as gratefully as all the other gifts that had been showered on him that day. The stately buildings of Fifth Avenue did not feel as intimidating as they had a couple of days earlier.

The Marner Foundation's office was on the 15th floor of a discreetly substantial Park Avenue building. The office door was opened by a valet, a handsome young fellow wearing tightly fitting clothes. The secretary, sitting languidly at a desk loaded with knick-knacks, was also a good-looking young man. "Mr. Schatz will see you shortly," he told Bruno. "Have a chair and please do not smoke. Mr. Schatz cannot stand smoking." Though Bruno did not smoke, he was grateful for the kindly warning. "The boss has a number of such prejudices. But he is a very, very kind fellow, as you will see."

Schatz proved to be a tall, thin man in his seventies. He spoke with a slightly affected accent, and had a Legion d'Honneur ribbon at his lapel. A faint but noticeable aura of perfume emanated from his person.

The interview was obviously a success. Schatz made Bruno sit in a chair across from his desk, but himself remained standing near his guest. During the conversation--he seemed to know a lot about scientists and about science as well--Schatz kept one hand or the other on Bruno's shoulder, pressing on him with strong fingers as if to keep him from getting up. Finally he moved away, sat down at his desk, and promised he would put Bruno's request before his board. "Given Professor Siegmullen's recommendation--which had reached me yesterday--there is little doubt the decision would be favorable." Then, placing his arm around Bruno's shoulders in an affectionate way, almost an embrace, Schatz led him to the door and dismissed him.

That evening Bruno had dinner with Heinrich and Miller. He had brought home a bottle of French wine to celebrate his almost assured success.

"Mr. Schatz seems kind and knowledgeable," he said recounting the morning's visit. "But there is something strange about him and even about the Foundation altogether."

"Of course," said Heinrich laughing. "I should have told you beforehand. Schatz lived in Paris for many years before the war. They say he was a close friend of André Gide."